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May 24, 2019

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Re: Pending electronic transaction standards for health care attachments

Dear Secretary Azar:

When Congress passed the Health Information Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996, one of the central goals was to modernize the flow of health care information in the face of rapid technological advances. Part of that goal involved the promulgation of several rules to promote national standards in electronic health care transactions and to support system interoperability among health information entities.

However, for more than two decades now, with two intervening laws directing the Secretary to act, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has still failed to publish electronic standards for attachments that would facilitate the exchange of medical documentation needed to support prior authorization, claims payment, and value-based care. This inaction is causing significant drain on the efficiency of our health system.

I ask that HHS move forward to promulgate a final rule stipulating electronic transaction standards for health care attachments based on the recommendations from the National Committee on Vital and Health Services (NCVHS) that incorporate emerging new technologies as quickly as possible, before the end of the fiscal year.

Currently, 84 percent of attachments are manually exchanged between healthcare providers and health plans and only 12 percent of provider prior authorization requests for patient care are submitted electronically.¹ These manual operations persist primarily due to a lack of

¹ CAQH CORE Report on Attachments: A Bridge to a Fully Automated Future to Share Medical Documentation, May 2019. <https://www.caqh.org/sites/default/files/core/core-attachments-environmental-scan-report.pdf>

standardization for electronic transmittal of attachments.² By one estimate, the promulgation of an attachment transaction standard would reduce per transaction costs for the exchange of medical documentation by over 60 percent.³

The Council for Affordable Quality Healthcare estimated that efficiencies gained from the adoption of these attachment standards could save hundreds of millions of dollars per year. This estimate does not account for savings associated with streamlining other transactions such as post-claims adjudication and payment for coordination of benefits across payers.

Given your interest in reducing provider burden and improving information flow, along with the significant savings that can be achieved by publication and adoption of these standards, I am hopeful that you will understand the benefit of moving quickly on this issue.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. For additional questions, please contact Amy Hall of the Committee on Ways and Means Majority staff at (202) 225-3625.

Sincerely,



Richard E. Neal
Chairman
Committee on Ways and Means

² 2018 CAQH Index, A Report of Healthcare Industry Adoption of Electronic Business Transactions and Cost Savings, January 2019. <https://www.caqh.org/sites/default/files/explorations/index/report/2018-index-report.pdf>

³ CAQH Index (2017), commercial market only; American Medical Association PA Physician Survey (2017)